

# Study Committee on Adoption

*Tuesday, August 12, 2014, 2:00 P.M. to 4:00 P.M.  
Indiana Government Center South, Conference Room C*

**Members present:** Jane Bisbee, Chair; Michele Jackson, adoptive mother and adoption attorney; Gregg Ellis, Guardian ad Litem/Child Advocates, Marion County; Judge Dana Kenworthy, Grant Superior Court 2; Tamara Wilson, DCS Legal; Judge Steven Galvin, Monroe Juvenile Court; Sharon Pierce, Villages; Zachary Kester, adoptive father and adoption attorney; Karen Sauer, adoptive mother.

**Guests present:** Lindsey Craig, Brady Brooks, Parvonay Stover, Angel Owens.

**Commission staff present:** Lindsey Craig, Governor's Office Policy Director; Brady Brookes, DCS Legislative Director.

- I. **Welcome:** Jane Bisbee welcomes the committee. Introduces herself, as well as support staff for the committee. Jane also gives her background with the Department of Child Services.
- II. **Introduction of Committee Members:** Committee members introduce themselves, giving their specific backgrounds.
- III. **Discussion of Committee Rules:** Jane reads all standing committee rules, reviews House Enrolled Act 1222, and asks for questions/comments from the committee. Question raised by Tamara Wilson regarding whether or not there will be additional ground rules. Tamara requests to add a rule to committee regarding current pending litigation against the state involving adoption and adoption assistance indicating that we cannot have that as a topic of discussion. Jane says it will be noted, but no need to add to rules. Jane Bisbee entertains motion to approve these committee rules. Motion made to adopt committee rules, passes committee vote, and rules are adopted.
- IV. **Appointment of Deputy Chair for the Committee:** Jane Bisbee indicates she will not put anyone on the spot today. If anyone is interested in becoming Deputy Chair for the Committee, email Jane at [jane.bisbee@dcs.in.gov](mailto:jane.bisbee@dcs.in.gov) or email the committee at [adoptionstudycommittee@gov.in.gov](mailto:adoptionstudycommittee@gov.in.gov). This will be made first agenda item at next meeting.
- V. **Review of Statute:** Lindsey Craig reviews how committee came to exist. Governor wants Indiana to be the most adoption friendly state in the country. Discusses HEA 1222. Part of bill has already taken effect. Created first tax credit for families in Indiana. Second part of that bill includes what created this committee. Reviews charge given for committee (see attached).

Nov 1, 2014 originally listed as the date that committee shall submit a report on their progress, but have discussed with legislators that this date will be used as halfway point. The final report will be submitted by June 30, 2015. Intention with this committee is to look at all issues currently facing adoptive parents. What can we do to make Indiana better? How can we better support, provide better resources, raise awareness, and make it more affordable to adopt? Perhaps committee can have concrete recommendations to improve.

Lindsey announces that the Governor has directed DCS to fund the State Adoption Subsidy for State Fiscal Year 2015.

## **VI. Overview of Adoption Basics:**

**Reba James**, DCS Deputy Director of Permanency and Practice Support gives high level overview of adoption. The primary responsibility of DCS is to preserve the family, however, we do have kids whose relationship with their parents has been terminated. We then need to get them to permanency through adoption. Our kids are either adopted by relative/s or current foster families, but sometimes that doesn't happen. There are kids that are difficult to place. Discusses the Special Needs Adoption Program (SNAP). We have workers (SNAP workers) that work with (DCS) field staff, as well as working to recruit adoptive families. Once our workers identify a family, there is a prep process, home study process, and training. DCS looks at both sides to match a child with a family. Also discusses post-adoption services. When issues come up, adoptive families are able to contact the SNAP worker. That worker talks to the family, finds out issues, and resolves.

- Gregg Ellis question: Policy on when SNAPS referral can be initiated. Do they have to wait until TPR? Reba will check on timing.
- Jane clarifies who is eligible for post-adopt services. The answer is all who have adopted.
- Tamara – how do families access post-adopt services?

**Tamara Wilson** explains the legal division and how DCS legal gets involved, as well as what they do to achieve adoption.

- Zachary Kester questions whether the cost of a home study is borne by DCS, or is it by the private attorney? Tamara Wilson states that there is a form of adoption assistance that is available, which is known as non-recurring adoption expense/s. Yes, there is reimbursement available for home studies.

- Jane Bisbee indicates that licensed foster parents (who go on to adopt their foster children) do not have the cost of home study because it was paid for by DCS when they were getting licensed.
- Sharon Pierce questions if we know what percentage of kids are adopted by their foster parents. Jane will find out.

**Michele Jackson** discusses her general conversations with prospective adoptive parents. They are best interest of the children, safety issues, mental health issues of adoptive parents, child's mental health issues, general health of the child, and financial aspects of adoption. There are **domestic adoptions** which can include infant; private; foster to adopt; step-parent adoption; relative adoption; disruptive/disillusioned adoption (where a child is adopted and then the parents no longer want the adoption to stay intact); and second parent adoption. In Indiana it is a statutory-driven process. Details are within statute (I.C. 31-19). One concern is putative father and how he can contest adoption. Gave example of case where child placed in adoptive home for several years, but putative father was able to "step back in". There are also **inter-country/international adoptions**. This includes children being adopted from other countries, as well as unaccompanied children crossing the United States boarder. International adoption has drastically changed. Any Indiana resident now has to use a federally accredited or approved entity in order to perform their international adoption.

**Judge Steven Galvin** gives his perspective on adoption. As judges they try not to forget that for these families there is rarely anything more important than adoption. Cognizant that they (Judges) need to move children toward permanency. Discusses how there are low income families who want to adopt, but they cannot afford an attorney and do not understand process. Suggests that committee look at low income families and how to make it more understandable/affordable to adopt. How can we make this process more clear, concise, and available?

## **VII. Topics for future meeting dates:**

Discussion held regarding topics for upcoming meetings. Committee reviews compiled suggestions and decides upon topics for the next two meetings. Karen Sauer suggests adoption awareness. Sharon Pierce suggests barriers.

October 1, 2014 - ***ADOPTION AWARENESS***

- Sharon Pierce suggests discussion on social media
- Judge Galvin suggests discussion on African Americans/Hispanics

November 19, 2014 - ***BARRIERS***

**VIII. Future Commission Meeting Dates:**

- **October 1, 2014            10:00 A.M. – 12:00 P.M.**
- **November 19, 2014       10:00 A.M. – 12:00 P.M.**
- **January 14, 2015          10:00 A.M. – 12:00 P.M.**
- **March 11, 2015           10:00 A.M. – 12:00 P.M.**

Location TBD